



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

“We Are Afghans, Too”

USAID project provides essential tools and services to help Kuchi nomads thrive



Photo: IRD/AVIPA Plus

Sardar Mohammed is the Kuchi Department Director for Kandahar Province. He says that while many aid projects overlook the needs of Afghan nomads, livestock tools and implements distributed by AVIPA Plus are making a difference for many in his community.

USAID’s AVIPA Plus project has connected 40,000 Kuchi nomads to the formal government and is providing them with livestock care tools and animal husbandry training to improve their quality of life.

Sardar Mohammad has been a shepherd for most of his life. Now he works for the government, shepherding a different type of flock. As Kuchi Department Director, he is responsible for more than 350,000 Kuchi nomads in Kandahar Province and is intimately in tune with the needs of his people. However, government resources are limited, and aid programs aimed at Kuchis are few.

Now, a USAID-funded project is awarding grants to improve the livelihoods of Kuchi herders in Kandahar Province. So far, nearly 40,000 Kuchi herders have benefited from the project.

Kuchis have wandered Afghanistan’s seasonal grazing routes for centuries. They depend almost entirely on their herds of sheep and goats for food and income. USAID’s Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) Plus project provides Kuchi associations with tents, butter churns, and livestock tools geared toward the nomadic lifestyle, such as sheep shears, sickles, grain mills, mangers, and water troughs. In addition, animal husbandry training by AVIPA Plus helps Kuchi herders identify and treat diseases, improving milk output and overall nutrition.

Mohammad says the grants do not come without inherent risks. “I’ve received letters at night from the Taliban saying that if I don’t stop accepting foreign aid they will kill me,” he explained. “Many Kuchis are afraid to accept help. I tell them that we must act together. We have too much at stake.”

Kuchis live in extreme poverty, and Mohammad says this makes them susceptible to Taliban influence. “When the Taliban needs new fighters, they often try to bribe Kuchis to help them. It’s important for us to choose our allies from among those who help us, not those who make our lives more difficult.”

USAID/AVIPA Plus works in collaboration with the provincial government. As a result, Mohammad says, the project is not only improving Kuchi livelihoods, it is also helping them feel that they are part of the larger Afghan community.

“There are millions of Kuchis in Afghanistan, but because of our wandering lifestyle we’re often ignored. We needed someone to see us and recognize our needs. After all, we are Afghans, too.”